

BOLDUC, Pierre, Captain

'Most scary moment'

Incredible journey for CFB Trenton twosome

By Nancy Gummow

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Capt. Pierre Bolduc knows he cheated death flying a Labrador helicopter over Baffin Island's icy waters last November.

Bolduc, who hadn't slept in 15 hours, was racing against time to save survivors of a military air crash near the North Pole.

"I was very nervous and I started to get really scared," Bolduc said. "But you had to push those thoughts out of your mind. You had to think about the people who were alive."

Bolduc and Capt. Mark Levesque left Canadian Forces Base Trenton early Thursday morning, Oct. 31, 1991, for Alert, N.W.T., about 12 hours after the Hercules crash.

Their 37-hour flight to the world's most northerly settlement was packed with heart-wrenching moments, Bolduc remembers.

Near the island's Clyde River, Bolduc was flying between 100 and 500 feet above Baffin Bay's frigid waters. In the dead of night, Bolduc almost ran into a pack of icebergs.

"It was probably the most scary moment of my life," he said. "We ended up in bad weather. I couldn't see anything. I'm thinking if I crash, it could be days before we're rescued."

Bolduc slowed the helicopter and carefully flew between the mist of ice and the mountains below the Labrador. The copter's navigational aids were askew - another huge hurdle.

Bolduc tried to remain calm, but his mind and heart were racing.

"It's not a very comfortable feeling. If any-

thing would have gone wrong we would have been in very big, big trouble," he said. "I thought to myself what the hell am I doing here. Let's go back home."

Bolduc and Levesque's incredible journey to the North Pole would take them 3,600 miles to Eureka, south of Alert, before being told 13 survivors were already rescued.

"I got the phone call about the survivors and I'm thinking to myself it would have been nice to have been there. We wanted to help," said Bolduc. "But we were happy we tried and glad it was over because we were so tired."

The pilot's tale - for the first time - comes to life in "Death and Deliverance" a Robert Mason Lee book about the haunting plane crash.

Bolduc never talked to the author, but Lee spoke extensively with Levesque.

Bolduc and Levesque have gone their separate ways - despite a genuine respect and admiration for each other.

The two pilots haven't spoken about their remarkable dash.

"We'll probably get together one day and talk about it," he said. "I liked flying with Mark. We trusted each other."

Two months ago, Bolduc was posted to CFB Halifax's rescue co-ordination centre. Levesque is on leave from CFB Trenton until later this month.

Bolduc's memories of the Labrador's journey live within his mind. His recollections haven't diminished despite the passing of time.

Said Bolduc: "It was the most difficult trip of my flying career. But it was also the most memorable. I'll never forget it."

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